Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.lss.bc.ca

News Release

July 27, 2005

For Immediate Release:

Legal aid rolls out Supreme Court family duty counsel services

LSS is an independent, non-profit organization that has provided legal aid to people with low incomes in BC since 1979.

Legal representation is available for serious family issues (e.g., involving child apprehension matters or domestic violence) and serious criminal problems. It is also available for some immigration, mental health law, and prison law matters.

Legal advice is available through duty counsel, the Brydges Line, and the province-wide toll-free LawLINE.

Legal information is available through LawLINE, plain language publications, and Internet services, including the Electronic Law Library, the Family Law in British Columbia, the LSS, and the LawLINK websites.

*To contact the **LSS Call Centre and LawLINE**, dial: (604) 408-2172 (Lower Mainland) or 1-866-577-2525 (toll free from outside the Lower Mainland).*

Vancouver, BC — Low income parents who are separating or divorcing but cannot afford to hire a lawyer can now turn to Supreme Court duty counsel for some free legal assistance.

The Legal Services Society (LSS) now provides family duty counsel in 12 Supreme Courts across BC and plans to add the service in more locations throughout the year.

"This service has been highly successful in Provincial Courts, and the judiciary has been asking us to expand it to Supreme Courts," said LSS Executive Director Mark Benton. "When we evaluated the Provincial Court service in Vancouver, we found that more than one-third of the clients achieved an immediate resolution to their legal problem with duty counsel help," he added.

Family duty counsel can speak in court for financially eligible people on simple matters such as adjournments, consent and emergency restraining orders, and uncontested custody, access, and support hearings. They can also help draft documents; review documents to be filed in court; negotiate and settle issues; give clients advice about their legal rights, obligations, and court procedures; and refer clients to other resources. They do not provide representation at trial.

The service now operates at the Supreme Courts in Chilliwack, Duncan, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nanaimo, Prince George, Revelstoke, Salmon Arm, Terrace (advice only), Vancouver (which began as a pilot project in October 2004), Vernon, and Victoria (see Backgrounder). It will be available in New Westminster by September.

"We have worked with court staff and local lawyers to tailor the services to meet each community's needs," Benton said.

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This is another of the family law service improvements implemented by LSS since the provincial government increased core funding for legal aid by $4.6 million last February. The new funding also supports family duty counsel services in Provincial Courts; a new extended family services program for legal aid clients whose high conflict cases, if left unresolved, would leave them at great risk; and limited Supreme Court family referrals.

For further information, please contact:

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